



175th Anniversary Moment

“He who promised is faithful” (Heb 10.23)

ALBERT BECK

On Ascension evening, May 31, 1962, worshipers at First Saint Paul’s were surely shocked and concerned when the organist did not arrive for church. Albert Beck was a full-time professor of music at Concordia, where he lived in a campus apartment, and served as part-time as organist and choir director at First Saint Paul’s. After the service, and a wellness check by the police, it was determined that Prof. Beck had died at home the previous day of natural causes at the age of 68.

Albert Beck had a very interesting early life. Born in 1894, and orphaned at the age of four, he was adopted by a Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Beck in Decatur, Illinois. In high school he made his way to Addison to finish high school and then stayed for college, graduating in 1914. This was the first graduation class after Concordia had moved from Addison to River Forest. After graduation, he stayed on as an instructor in the music department, and was called as a professor in 1922. At Concordia, he directed the a cappella choir into the 1940s. He had two daughters and a son, Theodore, who went on to teach at Concordia College in Seward, Nebraska.

Prof. Beck served First Saint Paul’s for 31 years, from 1931 until the time of his death. Apparently, First Saint Paul’s had not previously had a choir, but when Beck arrived, he asked Pastor Henry Kowert if he might establish a choir. There was an overwhelming initial response of 72 people! In 1935, the choir presented a “Christmas Musicales,” which included a new piece composed by Prof. Beck, various scripture readings, vocal solos, and other choral pieces. According to one of our earlier anniversary booklets, choir rehearsals were held on Friday nights. In the 30s, the choir had regularly about 60 members, but gradually that number declined to about 40 in 1942 and about 20 in 1956, surely a sign of changes in the community and Lutheranism in the city. In 1951, a new 3-manual Casavant organ was installed in the church under Prof. Beck’s guidance.

Albert Beck’s funeral was held at Grace Lutheran Church, River Forest, with Pastor Manz preaching. Construction noise in Sandberg Village precluded having the service at the church. Yet First Saint Paul’s was near to Albert Beck’s heart. In a memo written to Pastor Manz in August 1961, on the occasion of the church’s 115th anniversary, Beck stated, “I am happy to tell you that I feel just as you do in regard to our church. I wouldn’t want to be the organist in any other church.”